Avian flu: What farmers should do



Medical experts from Agricultural Ministry taking samples from infected duck at Bukakata Landing Site on Wednesday. PHOTO BY MARTINS E. SSEKWEYAMA

With an outbreak of avian influenza reported in Uganda, here are some facts to know about the disease, writes **Lominda Afedraru**.

This week, the ministries of agriculture and health issued an alert about an avian flu outbreak in Wakiso, Kalangala and Masaka districts. This followed reports of several migratory birds found dead on the shores of Lake Victoria in these areas.

In his statement, Agriculture minister Vincent Ssempijja revealed that specimens taken from white-winged tern found in Lutembe, Wakiso District, turned positive for the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

Dr Halid Kirunda, the director of Naro's Mbarara zonal research institute, who is an expert in avian influenza, explains that there had been some farmers had previously reported deaths of their birds but did not know AI virus was the cause.

The current outbreak is of the highly pathogenic (disease causing) virus which has not only occurred in Uganda but in Africa.

Egypt is one of the countries considered endemic to bird flu and hence a threat to other countries, especially those with which it shares a global wild bird migratory route such as Uganda.

Avian Influenza genetic material has been detected in free-living water birds, domestic ducks, turkeys, chickens and pigs.

Specifically, the H5 strain was detected in 45 birds out of 4,052 positive samples in a study carried out between 2010 and 2014.

In Uganda, genetic cause and antibodies against AI viruses were detected in wild and domestic birds as well as pigs mainly in central Uganda.

It is prevalent in March and November, January, September and December; more so in wet than dry seasons.

Farmers should restrict movement of poultry to free areas and confine birds to protect them from infection.

They should avoid hunting, purchase and processing of wild birds, poultry farmers who visit sites within 1.5km used as shelter by wild birds should keep disinfecting their hands.

They should prevent restocking of farms with birds from unreliable sources including live bird markets.

Farmers must practise quarantining of newly introduced birds before mixing them with the rest and restrict access of visitors to farms including avoiding sharing of poultry farm equipment.

For those trading in poultry, the solution is to quarantine all live bird markets in affected areas, regular disinfection of markets and avoid mixing different bird species in a market including confining sick birds in a cage.

There are vaccines for a number of poultry diseases in Uganda such as Newcastle and Gumboro. For avian influenza, a vaccine is being developed in most affected regions such as Asia. It has an efficacy rate of 60 per cent and it induces immunity between three to six months.

NOTE

It is mainly wild birds and ducks which are reservoir of the virus because they expel the virus through their liquid excretment. When a bird is infected, it can be noticed from these signs: Sudden death, loss of appetite, reduced feeding, less egg production, coughing, nasal and eye discharge, swollen face, purple coloration of comb and green diarrhoea.

What previous incidences of avian flu show about this outbreak

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